DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 084 062 RC 007 445

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TITLE Community Development in Rural Appalachia.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Community Development; *Economic Factors; *Educational Needs; Migration Patterns; Models; *Program Development; *Rural Areas
IDENTIFIERS *Appalachia

ABSTRACT

An Appalachia Educational Laboratory Expert Opinion Survey ranked the need for changing attitudes within and about Appalachia and the need for educational leadership as the two most important problems to be faced within the next 5 years. In this paper, three situations were described as typical attempts to change the educational scene in Appalachia. It was noted that a total community development program must be the goal. The concept of community development described in the paper included not only educational development but development of the economic, health, religious, government, agriculture, social, welfare, and business life of the community. A proposed action plan suggested goals of the project, means for goal achievement, and staffing. The plan called for a focused development of all institutions rather than education alone. (PS)

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Community Development in Rural Appalachia

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1973

Many needs studies have revealed a multitude of pressing educational needs for the Appalachia area. Such needs as career information and vocational education, development of reading skills, personnel training and development (including leadership, ECE, adult education, and changing of the Appalachia attitudes of defeatism are found in a majority of needs studies. But education does not function in isolation or in a vacuum from the society it serves in rural Appalachia. Perhaps more than in an urban or suburban setting, the decisions made about the schools (especially staffing and budgetary decisions but also programmatic decisions) are so closely controlled by the political power structure that to attempt to improve public education without concurrent efforts to change the "life space" in which public schools and public school officials must operate is something akin to an exercise in futility.

The problem is essentially one of identifying a vehicle through which each of these particular and highly specialized problems might be addressed, solutions proposed and implemented, but in a climate where an educational idea can survive on its own merits rather than because it is politically feasible or is supported by an influential member of the power structure. The Appalachia community is a politically oriented community with the primary goal of such politics being an economic one. Schools in rural

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Appalachia are by far the biggest business in said community. Control of the school budget and staffing decisions then is a major goal in this power-economic struggle. Quality education is not even paid lip-service. Board members could frequently care less.

Coupled with this strong economic motive for control of the schools is the fact that most of the community leadership is somewhat limited in its perceptions about quality schools. The community has few outsiders settling there. In fact, the migration is outward with the youth who leave the community for a college education or employment outside frequently leaving for good. Most of the teachers and school administrators are indeed "home grown" products. Generally speaking, the leadership at the local level, as well as school patrons, is uninformed about innovative alternative approaches to teaching and learning. Within an environment where perceptions are limited there is little acceptance or interest in special programs intended to improve the educational program. Figures revealing reading problems, high drop-out rates, high illiteracy, etc. mean little or nothing. "Good" is a relative term and what is "good" to an Appalachian community leader is "brand x" in the mainstream of America. The basic problems, stated as questions include: How can the perceptions of the community leader in Appalachia be broadened in order that he can understand the need for and be willing to support change in the local schools?" "How can attitudes be changed so that the long-range development of the community through support of public education can become reality?" "How

can values be reoriented in order that quality education can become the goal rather than use of school monies and staff positions as a part of the community rewards system for relatives or to support partisian politics?"

These are the paramount problems in rural Appalachia, for without their solution all other problems and program development thrusts to resolve them will become subservient to the political-economic realities of the region.

Justification of Need

Needs studies conducted in Appalachia are remarkable in their similarity. They generally reveal the need for:

1. Basic skill development (including reading, listening, spelling, written expression).
2. Career-vocational development.
3. Early childhood education.

One approach for AEL* would be to develop programs which directly attended to the reported needs. In such an approach a program for basic skill development, early childhood or career-vocational education would be high priority choices.

The position posited here, however, is that the above named needs represent symptons only--symptons of an institutional or community need far greater than the individual needs considered above. To identify programs to treat these specific needs in isolation is analogous to swabbing a sore throat, giving temporary relief but not removing the source of the problem.

* Appalachia Education Laboratory

At least four of the needs studies identified improved attitude toward school as a priority need.[1] (The writer interprets this to include total community attitudes toward both program and operational aspects of schools.) Three of the studies report adult and continuing education.[2] Improved leadership for education is a topic of concern mentioned in four of the studies.[3] These three areas of need seem to represent causes rather than symptoms of the very most basic problems or needs of Appalachia. A program aimed at the solution of these very basic problems seems mandatory as a prerequisite for solution of the more specific problem areas. Out of such a solution of these basic problems should grow an awareness on the part of the community of the specific program needs as well as a climate conducive to problem solving and new program developments.

Needs studies are helpful in identifying problems; however, to make the transition between a needs study and a new program requires what might be identified as a "cognitive leap." One must ask such questions as "what program(s) will make a long-range impact on the problems identified?" "What is the priority program?" Two particular groups were asked questions closely related to the two posed here, the "AEL Experts" and the AEL Membership.

The AEL Expert Opinion Survey ranked "need for changing attitudes within

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[1]Campbell, MC., Directions for Educational Development in Appalachia, Appalachia Education Laboratory, Inc. (Charleston, West Virginia) pp. 5, 27, 41, 49.

[2]Ibid., pp. 41, 49.

[3]Ibid., pp. 5, 19, 41, 49.

and about Appalachia" and "need for educational leadership, all facets" as the number one and two problems respectively, within the next five years. They also reported "need for a new or changed organization of the system, political and instructional" (number four), "need for continuing and adult education" (number nine) as priority problems to be solved.[4]

The AEL Membership, with more than two-hundred persons participating, produced a list of seven educational development needs. These include:

> A pattern for community schools, involving programs of educational experience for all members of the family developed out of resources provided by representatives of education, industry, business; based on shared studies of the needs of the area. (Selected by ten groups.)
>
> To develop a structure and operation which would put into effect the innovative programs (already developed by AEL and others), focusing on communicative skills.
>
> A system for the development of self-respect among pupils and interpersonal respect between pupils.
>
> Improved models for improved communications between school-community agencies and between teachers-administrators and school-home.
>
> A process or program to bring about attitudinal change among the groups of administrators, teachers, parents, students and others involved in and with education.
>
> Home intervention in education from prenatal on, with a multi-disciplinary approach--medical, social--educational and environmental which would involve retraining of teachers to deal with real problems of Appalachia to significantly change parents and students.
>
> A program to provide worthwhile learning experiences to individuals--in and out of schools--devising model

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[4] Ibid., 43, 44.

> organizational structures in which these things can happen, including improved communications, climates for changes, with stress on attitudinal changes.[5]

What all of this suggests then is simply that any attempt to change the educational scene in Appalachia, without concurrent efforts to affect change of the social, economic, and political areas of community life, will have very limited impact. Educational institutions, especially in rural Appalachia, interact with all other institutions in a community. Recognition of this simple fact certainly suggests the need for a very different approach to educational change; that is, if the change is to be significant, lasting, and contemporary.

Typical of attempts to change the educational scene in Appalachia, in isolation from any other community development, are the following.

Situation A

A small school district diagnosed its major problem as reading (most frequently chosen as the problem of all problems with the solution erasing all other problems). The district involved outside reading consultants and prepared an excellent developmental plan to overcome the problems in the form of a Title III proposal. The plan called for the hiring of several reading specialists, to be further trained by a nearby university, with the specialists in turn responsible for program and instructional development in various of the school centers. The local board of education delayed a decision to implement the program until

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[5]Ibid., pp. 50-51.

November and then proceeded to hire "political appointees" to the specialists positions (over the protests of local school administrators). These appointees were totally untrained to assume such a role and perhaps more importantly, somewhat disinterested. They were habitually late and absent from work. Local school teachers did not respect their competence. The program was very limited in its success. Diagnosis: Through the hiring process the primary goals of the program became political and economic rather than improvement of the reading program.

Situation B

E.P.D.A. funds were secured and utilized to train all teacher aides for several school districts. Participation was excellent and the workshop was obviously quite successful in helping the aides understand their role and in preparing them for it. Toward the end of the workshop local elections were held in the districts, with school board members being among those positions to be elected. In one district the balance of power on the school board shifted. One consequence--all aides (just completing training for the position) were released and political appointees (totally untrained) assumed their positions. Title monies and especially those used for new positions within a district, have become a major part of the patronage system in rural, local Appalachian school districts. Diagnosis: an educationally sound and effective program prostituted in favor of political and economic goals.

Situation C

A university was invited to conduct a pre-school workshop for a district's high school faculty. The workshop was planned to "unfreeze" the faculty, causing

them to explore alternative ways of organizing their school and alternative instructional strategies. The workshop proceeded according to plan with the end result being the identification (by faculty and administration) of six problem areas within the school and with the faculty organizing itself for solution of those six problems during the coming school year. The local university was to give continued support to the faculty in its activities. Nineteen of the twenty faculty gave strong written evaluations of the workshop, saying in effect that it was the first workshop they had ever attended which would "make a difference" in the school. The one other person, although he did not complete a written evaluation, gave strong verbal reactions in support of the workshop. Three weeks later the university consultant returned to the school and there had been no progress or activity in implementing the plan for problem solving within the school. The lack of progress was blamed upon opening of school activities, etc. Four weeks later the consultant conducted a one day follow-up workshop. Still no progress had been made locally. The lack of progress was reviewed. At this point the faculty reported that the six priority tasks identified during the workshop were no longer priority problem areas. Nor would the faculty discuss any any new priorities. Diagnosis: Political restraints were applied to stop some rather progressive ideas and developments in the high school. One faculty member told the consultant that "our only priority is survival." None wanted to risk being transferred to Hollow Rock School. (Not the real name of the school but each rural Appalachia district has one or more "undesirable" type schools to which it religiously transfers those tenured teachers who dare to "buck" the power structure. This was a clear case where the faculty

was more progressive than the community it served.

What seems to be needed is a total community development thrust. People must be allowed to broaden their preceptions of life and life styles beyond those developed in isolation from alternatives. Economic development must accompany such exploration of alternatives, for without a significant change in the economic lives of most Appalachian residents no real exploration, evaluation, and adoption of alternatives is possible. Economic development would also have great impact upon the power structure of the community and the ability of a few to control the thoughts and actions of the masses. Again, without economic independence the possibility for survival of new ideas or alternative modes of operation are slight.

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED PLAN OF ACTION

The preceeding dialogue describes in some detail, the problems faced in changing education in rural Appalachian school districts. What must evolve is a total community development program. Admittedly, change in the various community institutions will occur along a broken front, but change in one of the institutions (educational) simply cannot occur in a setting where the community leaders and institutions other than education recognize nor feel any need for alternative modes of operation. This concept of community development includes not only educational development but development of the economic, health, religious, government, agriculture, social, welfare, and business life of the community.

Goals of the Project

Three basic goals appear paramount. They include:

(a) broadening of perceptions of leaders in all areas of community life as to the range of alternatives available to them;

(b) formulation of long-range community development plans through a high degree of involvement of people of the community; and

(c) a coordinated funding effort to bring about implementation of the long-range plans.

Means for Goal Achievement

Initially the power structure of the community would be identified. Members of a community development task force would be chosen from among the members of the power structure on such a basis as to assure broad representation from the various socio-political-economic groups within the community. This task force would then participate in a year long "perception broadening" series of experiences aimed toward helping them to know and understand the range of alternatives before them in all aspects of community life, i.e., business, education, welfare, etc. Among other experiences, task force members would hear presentations, view films, read about programs and visit model programs throughout Appalachia and the remainder of the United States. Emphasis during this stage would be upon causing task force members to interact among themselves, the community, and the "outside" world. Attitudes are not changed in a vacuum, so an interactive climate would be crucial.

Stage two would call for generalizing this exploration of alternatives more broadly within the community and for the formulation of long-range planning groups. These planning groups would assume a specialized focus, i.e., business, education, welfare, etc., rather than the broad community development role, but always in a coordinated effort. Beyond the exploration of alternatives these groups would have the responsibility of developing a long-range developmental plan for their own specialized area. Then with some refinement of the special area plans, the coordinated total community development plan would be established by the original task force. In each stage of planning such techniques as surveys, interviews, town hall meetings would be utilized, in an effort to receive a high degree of community involvement and to affect consensus.

Stage three would include securing of the necessary outside support for each of the various aspects of the long-range plan and then implementation.

A general notion of the various stages and of the time involved shows:

Stage One--Identification of Power Structure and Broadening of Their Perceptions (1-2 years)

Stage Two--Broadening Community Perceptions and Long-Range Planning (1-2 years)

Stage Three--Funding and Implementation (4-6 years)

Total Time for Testing Concept (6-10 years)

Staffing

Stage One of the program would call for a limited number of staff, process oriented persons who know how to involve people in planning, have broad

knowledge of community development, and are generally aware of model projects around the country. Stage two would require the expansion of the staff to include a specialist in each area for development, i.e., business, education, health, etc. This specialist would need to have a broad knowledge of programs development in his speciality and have demonstrated the ability to secure federal funds in that speciality. Stage three would require continuation of the staff described in Stage one and Stage two with additional resources needed according to long-range plans. Any additional staffing would be identified as continuing or special consultants rather than full-time staff.

Summary

As the writer understands A.R.C.*, this project is different essentially in scope. It is intended to affect change in a given community rather than throughout the Appalachian Region as is the case with A.R.C.'s mission. It is aimed, however, at the development of a model which could be generalized to other rural communities in Appalachia. In a sense the project suggests a cooperative, although greatly different from the Education Cooperative of A.E.L. This plan calls for a focused (county) development of all institutions rather than education alone. The cooperation is to be among various groups and agencies within a county rather than among counties or states. The focus is to be upon all institutions within a county rather than one institution in several counties. It is an in-depth, highly focused change model related to one community. In type of focus and design, it is different; in goals, it is similar for it proposes to build hope where there is despair; to generate enthusiasm

*Appalachian Regional Commission

for an area having high potential where now thereis only defeatism: to begin an upward spiraling curve in economics, education, health, and demograph where now the curve pummels downward. We have struggled with these hard realities of life in Appalachia for more than thirty years and the challenge remains unmet. We have not found the key to reversing the downward trend of the region. Perhaps the time is ripe for new, bold approaches.